

INTRODUCTION

THIS book is, if I am not greatly mistaken, a significant contribution to the as yet small body of free æsthetical criticism by Indian writers which has begun to grow in the last few years, partly through the influence of the new movement in painting, partly in reaction to western cultural impacts, but also partly, I believe, as a necessary ingredient of the cultural liberation which is taking place in India, and which must turn critically upon itself for its own vision of æsthetical truth.

For many centuries the creative expression of the Orient fulfilled itself, as far as I am aware, with practically no introspective inquisitiveness. The canons of China and India had, of course, implicit justifications, but they did not explain themselves: they laid out the *hows* of the arts, not the *whys*. This was possible with intuitive peoples undisturbed in their pellucid acceptances of things. But the passage of time has brought such peoples into relationship with other

peoples not of the intuitional order, peoples who work towards expression in the cellarage of the cosmic structure, and may or may not have a notion that the building which they are constructing, like the termites, over their own heads, has a roof upon it and perhaps a sky beyond it, but who take nothing for granted. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, China dominated the culture of western Europe. Perhaps by way of balancing up matters a fraction of Europe has since then insisted in pressing its culture on India. Neither effort has succeeded; but the contacts have raised questions, and the answering hands point in one direction towards things on the circumference of expression that must remain different till the end of time, and in the other direction towards things that are eternally the same. A work of art that is valid in the East may be invalid elsewhere, and *vice versa*; but art remains art, though just what it exactly is, has not been settled by Tolstoy or anyone else.

Were questions asked within earshot of conclusions, the spiritual adventures of huma-

nity would have become mere history. What is worth while in the researches of the spirit is not the end but the way towards it, not the findings but the finding. Were it otherwise, all expression would have its eyes in the back of its head, mourning over achievement instead of exulting for what is yet to be. Indeed, is not life more or less a commentary on a few verities which youth stumbles upon and puts in its hair, as I have seen Indian boys put glow-worms in their hair to light their way through night? A well-known London author recently stated that he knew all that he needed to know at eighteen, and that twenty-two years of experience since then had merely been experience, a ratification of intuition.

I have not sufficient personal acquaintance with the writer of this book to know without doubt whether he belongs fully to the intuitive order, and is a genuinely creative artist in the realm of æsthetical criticism. There are passages in the book that on the surface imply a knowledge that is beyond the possibility of the author either by travel or

reading, but that may belong to that inner vision and voice out of which the elaborations of life so logically come that he who is possessed of the vision possesses also its expression. If the latter be the case with the present author, then those who are on the watch for the white light of æsthetical wisdom, which has not yet been unveiled either in East or West save in fire-fly glimmers, may look forward with great hope to further work from the same pen. In any case, the present volume is notable, by virtue of rarity, in Indo-Anglian literature, and is full of a stimulating challenge.

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PREFACE

CARLYLE treated of heroes of different kinds and of different times, and essentially of the spirit of hero-worship in men. He gave us instances of the hero as conqueror, as prophet and as man of letters. We all may agree that possibly in every age some one or a few may rise above the rest of humanity in their powers of understanding and expression. But every day, humanity is swayed by vague thoughts and complex emotions. It requires the tools given of time and the subtle sense of discrimination to analyse and classify these hazy clouds of emotion and thought that chequer the vast sky of the daily life of humanity. But all men cannot stop every moment to look back upon the shape and nature of the cloud that has passed over them, for they must keep on running and running every minute of their existence. So it is only possible for them to just take a passing glimpse, a bird's

eye view of all that passes over them. To most men life is a race that must be run without rest or without even a stop to take a long breath. They know not where or why they go; only a necessity, an impulse to live, pushes them on from moment to moment. But fortunately for the world, nature, like a kind mother, makes exceptions. There are always men whose desire to know has enlightened and exalted their impulse to live into an aspiration for truth, which is at once to live and to know. They alone stop at every step to look back and around and try to know what forces are at work and conspire to bring about the next step. They also see if they have any share at all in the ever busy working of these invisible forces that seem to operate at the bidding of some unknown magic hand. They are the men who understand and express, each in his own peculiar way, the whither and the wherefore of the rush of the feelings and thoughts of humanity. For humanity needs to know what powers work in the profound depths of its own soul, so that a recognition of the

latent potencies of life may help towards their realisation.

Such men are few, very few indeed, who understand the nature and magnitude of the emotional and intellectual forces that shape and propel the daily life of humanity. They exclusively devote themselves to the study of the human heart and mind, so that they may interpret and direct their tendencies and activities in the light of an ideal of truth and beauty which by its transcendence of earthly limitations and by its spiritual magnificence can command the worship of humanity.

Such are the men known by the name of *Artists*. They are the messengers of God on earth, the prophets that can presage the weal or woe of life, and they are the incarnations of the biggest sparks from the eternal Light. Today they claim our admiration and following. No Alexander or Cæsar, no Mohamad or Sankara can fully satisfy the burning thirst for 'Life' in the human heart. For what we want is not wealth and empires or new religions (we have already too many),

no, not even new economic or social reforms, but a new philosophy of life. Our heart yearns for a clear vision of life itself, life in all the freshness of its varied manifestations and in the virility of its youthful beauty.

Secondly we require to know what is the trend of this vast life-energy, what unconscious force, what spiritual will determines its course and goal. To know and to realise this fundamental secret of the phenomenal world is the foremost aspiration of the human soul. What then is the way to it and how do these Artists know and express it?

What is art? If we know that, we can tell the artist's business. Whatever it may be, we know one thing, i.e., that it must have something to do with human beings. Nay, it must be one of man's most interesting things.

Every activity of the body and the mind is the expression of an inner struggle, of the soul, which seeks to affirm itself in terms of emotion and thought. Even as the universe is full of the varied expressions of the one supreme spirit, the human soul blossoms into a full realisation of itself by processes of self-

expression. The soul unfolds itself as does the flower by the out-pouring of its fragrance. Thus the universe consists of expressions and expressions alone. For, any existence is itself an expression of life-energy, which is so full and so rich that it cannot contain itself. Time, space, stone, water, life, light, air—all these are expressions embodying within themselves a force, an energy, whose fulness requires continuous and multifarious expression. But all to what end? Why not be content to simply be, to merely exist? Here we are face to face with truth. To be without expression which is to do or to act is impossible, for to be is to do. But a question may arise whether there was never a time when the universe was not, when man was not, when tree, light, air and ether were not? If these are the expressions of the one supreme spirit, how did it ever exist before all these expressions were? Is there any one who comes to our rescue and help us to a clearing of the doubt? We see in the Bible a friendly beckoning, "The word was God. The word was with God. The word was before God, (In the beginning was the

word)." If God was before all things, and the creator of them all, what can it mean to say the word was in the beginning? Again the word is God; it means God was before Himself. The sphinx must solve the riddle. The Universe must have an original energy of life which gives an impetus to its onward progress. This progress we call "Evolution" which implies a perpetual flux of life giving itself newer and fresher forms of expression. All forms dwell in space; hence, matter is the form that expresses the dynamic energy of life within. If evolution be the law of the Universe and if it be true that life eternally struggles for newer and fuller expression, nay, if life *lives* in its own expression, the riddle of the word was God and the word was with God and that God was in the beginning is easily solved. Life lives in matter. For life to live without matter or before it is self—negation. Life and matter are simultaneous in their origin and existence. God and the word, the primordial dynamic energy i.e., the spiritual force that comprehends within itself the eternal possibility of infinite truth, beauty

and joy, and the co-eval form that fills up space and time are an inevitable reality of truth. The one was not before the other. But the one and the other are each of man's life; life of matter and matter of life. Thought is the life of expression and expression is the marrow of thought. They make up the two in one, the *sath* and the *asath*.

The human soul with its limited range of experience, its limited capacity for expression, and its narrow means of perception which cannot penetrate beyond the physical and intellectual phenomena, is trying to grasp the spiritual truth whose existence it has learnt to suspect. The attitude in which man has an exclusive confidence in his frail measure of the intellect and its powers of analysis and deduction, is represented by science. Science indeed has carried man far into the interior of the temple of truth. It has thrown open the side-alleys. It has even led him into the very precincts of the sanctuary. But before the Holy light of truth resplendent with the riches of spiritual beauty, the great search-light of science is

itself extinguished. It is only a devotee's humble *sadhana* impelled by a selfless spiritual thirst for truth that can win the way to the All Holy. No mean curiosity, inebriated by the pride of scientific possession, but a profoundly felt yearning for truth, ennobled and enlightened by the knowledge accruing from a deep insight into the nature and beauty of the phenomenal Universe, alone, can win access to the feet of truth. Moreover truth is not to be known piece-meal, but all at once, even as a vision, and such a full vision of truth in the beauty of its wholeness alone is true realisation. Science can never lay claim to such a full vision of truth undivorced from its transcendent beauty. Such a realisation is possible only from an emotional point of view, for it is impossible, that by dividing anything into pieces, as does science, one can realise and enjoy the beauty of the unique wholeness of its individuality.

So then science, if its ambition is to realise the whole of reality at once, must abandon itself to despair or follow a richer life which, in its present pride, it spurns aside

as meaningless sentimentalism. Man is endowed with various faculties of sense and sensibility. Since man himself is one manifestation of this vast Universe and since his soul is like the swell of the ocean attracted by the moon of the Supreme Spirit, he must necessarily possess all the aspects that correspond in their kind, though not in degree, with those of the Universe and the Supreme Spirit. Man cannot know the supreme reality by any one of his several faculties alone. Through the intellect exclusively he may know only the abstract entity of the spirit, in other words, he may only have the "Thought" of God, never "God" Himself. It is the intuition, the sudden flash of the complete vision, that is necessary to know God Himself. One must be in a state of nervous tension, of emotional longing and expectancy, to be able to receive that divine intuition, when, Truth reveals itself to the soul in one all-embracing coruscation of light and beauty. At that moment, the soul is lost to itself in an ecstasy of realisation. Where else than in the poet's and the artist's highest moments can we find such

a divine experience of Truth, Beauty and Joy?

II

The greatest puzzle in life is life itself. You are ushered into existence and start on a journey of whose end you are not aware. You have a body, a mass of sensations, for you are always seeing, hearing, feeling, or smelling. You exist surrounded by a myriad varieties of phenomena which excite innumerable shades of motion and thought in you. You puzzle your brains over the meaning of this apparently busy-about-nothing universe. Nothing seems to matter, each thing or being, considered in its lonely singleness of individuality, sinks into ignorable obscurity, in the vast indefinable stupendousness of the size and activity of the universe. Take events next. Each event or even the history of whole nations together, seems as nothing in the eternity of time.

Again each thing in itself is very important, perhaps more important than all else put together. A flower, a blade of grass, a

leaf-bud, a crawling infant, the mellow note of a cuckoo:—how exquisitely sweet is each one of these in its unique beauty and loveliness. There is simply no use except to despair in taking things in their relation to one another or the universe, for, each thing or being was created just to be itself. You can resolve all things, however huge or strong or subtle and delicate, into a few fundamentals or elements as we call them. Matter may incarnate itself in the biggest shapes like the Himalayas or in the subtlest forms, like the delicate tint on the rose petal. Their singular importance is determined by their appeal to the human heart, since it is (at least as far as human beings are concerned) the one called upon to judge the universe.

When life allies with matter, for matter alone in its dead and inert massness of nature cannot shape itself, then the human heart is stirred in its affections. The subtler the form, the more intimate is the alliance between life and matter, till at last one feels at the sight of the exquisitely formed lips of a beautiful

face, or the tender sprout of a leaf-bud that it is all life and life alone. To the human heart life has the highest value. The sparkle in the diamond, the flush on the rose-petal, the exquisitely delicate modulations of a clear stream of sound, and the soul-melting gleam of pathos and love in the entreating looks of a lady's eyes—these have values in the estimate of the human heart that are not to be counted in terms of coin but in those of spiritual life and soul-union. What is it you can give in return for a beautiful face? for the most delicate refinement and symmetry of form? for the sweetest smell of a jasmine? for the soul-thrilling joy you feel when your lips touch the flush on your love's cheek? Not all the wealth of the earth and Heaven would be enough to free you from your debt. There is only one thing you can give and that is the centre of your own life, the life of your own soul, the soul of all your affections. That is LOVE. Love? What is it?

What else than the total resignation of your whole being unto the object of your admiration, the object that has touched the

springs of your life ! The life, the grain of truth that stands before you now in the form of beauty, (never is life without form) has awakened a new life in you. That new life, that sweet stream of nectar that has begun to flow from the profoundest depths of your-soul, is Love. Truly love brings with it a new life. The nerves are set tight, to the cadence of whose music we dance and the soul abandons itself in self-forgetfulness to that music and dance. What then is left ? Where is life, truth, where is beauty and where is love ? Nothing. Love transmutes itself into joy, ecstasy, *ananda*. Yea ! We have caught at the truth. Truth, beauty and joy—they make the fundamental basis and consummation of spiritual life.

The sages of yore called that *Sathchith-anandamurthy*. The personation of truth, beauty and joy is the spiritual Being. Here opens before us the path to that realisation wherein are enshrined all the three; and here on earth are all the three incarnated in the creations of nature. Here is life, the life of truth, the life of beauty, and of love.

If there be an activity on earth that charges itself with the mission of enshrining these incarnations, let that be named ART. Let it paint on its holy pages in the color of life itself, the highest visions of truth, beauty and love, for that last is none other than joy.

The artist is to deliver the mission, this mission of the incarnation of the *Sathchith-anandamurthy*.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART

I

ÆSTHETIC FACULTY

WHAT is the æsthetic sense or faculty that distinguishes man from the animal and presents the world in forms of beauty to him? We conclude from our being able to perceive what we call beauty in the objective world that we possess a faculty or mental potentiality that enables such an activity. But every perceptive faculty of the mind requires a sense organ through which alone it can operate. There is the visual faculty which works through the eye, the auditory faculty which works through the ear, and so on. By faculty is only meant a potentiality of the mind that corresponds with the sense-organ through whose agency alone any particular perception is possible. Knowing as we do, that what we call beauty in the things of the objective world is perceived not through any one of the sense-organs exclusively but through all these, we con-

clude there must be a faculty in the mind that corresponds in its nature with all these sense-organs. Since each one of these sense-organs has got a peculiar field of perception and since all these operate in being stimulated by the beautiful aspect of things, the commonness between all these senses is designated as the "Artistic sense." This artistic sense has not got a peculiar location or seat of concentration as the eye or the ear, but pervades through all the senses. But its recognition of the stimulation of beauty is independent of the pain or pleasure-sensation that the object stimulates. It is a mistake to suppose that beauty is invariably recognised in a pleasure-sensation, for there are instances when the æsthetic faculty is touched to its profoundest depths in spite of the short lasting painful emotions an object may excite. As a matter of fact beauty does not necessarily evoke a pleasurable sensation. Its recognition as such may alleviate the painful sensation and may even sweeten the pain of the excited emotion. Instances of such pain-experience in the presence of

beauty recognised as such may be with regard to the beauty in nature as well as in art. Any tragic representation in literature or art and any instance in nature like the setting of the sun when we desire that the day might last a little longer, or the black clouds swallowing up the bright moon, or the tree destitute of leaves in autumn, and such other spectacles are sad, nevertheless beautiful. Situations from human life like a lonely beggar-girl wandering miserably clad in rags but possessing the most appealing sparkle in her eyes and the soul-stirring poetry of form we call beauty:—do not these and many such other situations in nature and human life excite painful emotions in spite of which we recognise beauty in the stimulating objects? It is because the æsthetic faculty which is eternally on the look-out for beauty works from within these other senses of touch, sight, hearing, etc. “Pain and pleasure are one in beauty.” Often the results of its (æsthetic faculty’s) experience and impressions are mixed up and confused with those of the other senses. It is like pure

water flowing through multi-colored glass-tubes; and the observer may mistake the water that flows through them to be multi-colored. One may listen to the melodies that excite the saddest or the most joyful emotions. But, for that reason, the æsthetic faculty does not cease to grasp the beauty in the one case any more than in the other. The æsthetic, faculty i.e., the innate potentiality of the mind that dances to the subtle music of form, color or sound which human intelligence has termed 'beauty', that combustible aspect of the mind that at the touch of the subtle spark of beauty leaps up into a flame, a conflagration of fiery forms of angels—that æsthetic faculty is not partial to either pain or pleasure. It is the disinterested *yogi* that sees the *Brahman* in joy as well as in affliction and worships Him in both. Nay, this æsthetic faculty lives only in the realisation of beauty either in the poor or the rich, in pain or pleasure. This faculty has also got its counterpart in the emotional aspect of human life, even as the logical faculty has its counterpart in the aspiration for truth, be

it pleasant or unpleasant. Similarly there is in the human heart the aspiration for beauty.

But man in the present stage of civilisation lives not for what things are in themselves but in their ultimate values. Human civilisation is now not individualistic but social and hence is regulated by a code of social ethics and economics. There is an "ultimate value" or good towards whose realisation all the values of life must be made to consummate. The result is an eternal unrest and dissatisfaction and struggle. But in the midst of all this the æsthetic faculty, which is the perfectest expression of the mind, raises the as-yet-unheard note of warning against this callous evaluation of life in terms of selfish interest and suggests the true path towards the realisation of truth. That path is the total resignation, active yet, in the passivity of disinterested recognition and acceptance of experiences in all of which beauty, the divine voice, manifests itself.

For all purposes of ordinary life, the utilitarian outlook is indispensable, and the instinct of self-preservation asserts itself in-

variably by impelling one to acquire the highest gain with the least sacrifice. The mental outlook is narrowed into an evaluation of life from the point of view of the self, and the emotive being in us is taught to live a life of needs and eternal dissatisfaction. Any evaluation, be it economic, ethical or spiritual, is the outcome of a poverty of life and a morbid sense of the self's imperfection. The result of such a psychology on one's part is that one understands and speaks of things in terms of one's own needs and in terms of their response to one's biological demands. Never can a man in such an attitude know the objective world in its intrinsic quality or at least that quality which spontaneously appeals to him, not in response to his demands but as conferring a superfluous yet refreshing and elevating boon. Such a reception of the boon that things have got to offer on us presupposes a complete satisfaction on one's part, a perfection and fulness of life. Such a wealth of life expresses itself in a disposition that can receive impressions as they come to it in their unasked for

liberality and benevolence. Such a cognition of the object is to be called 'æsthetic cognition'. Needs must end, for æsthetic life to begin, because what need understands is the servile, the catering aspect of the universe and not its proud and majestic, conferring aspect. The latter is in the æsthetic experience. Hence it is entitled to a greater claim in understanding the universe in its superior elevating aspect. It elevates by conferring that which we do not crave for, thus adding to the wealth of our being or personality.

Æsthetic activity is, for this reason, the most perfect one and æsthetic experience, the most elevating experience, as being the outcome of a fulness or perfection of our being.

II

ÆSTHETIC LIFE

THERE is an untold wealth of beauty in the human soul. Every individual man possesses to a smaller or a greater degree the æsthetic faculty and hence can perceive in phenomena something more than what is useful to him. There is not a man with a healthy nervous system that cannot appreciate the influence of music or the pleasantness of a delicate blending of color. No one is completely impervious to the refreshing influence of a luxuriant spot in nature. In so far as every man is able to appreciate the harmonic frame of the mind and the pleasant surge of the heart which he identifies with the impression of the phenomenon, he shares in the æsthetic life as it is known. He refers the emotion and the mental attitude to a particular aspect of the phenomenon. And if that particular aspect does not happen to be the one that our physical and intellectual

being seeks in order to fill up our organic wants, but happens to impress us with a feeling of luxury, a sense of acquisition, it contributes to the enrichment of our being.

In the act of recognising the more than useful quality of the phenomenon there is a consciousness of discovery. A man goes in search of a stone to use it as a paper weight and finds a piece of marble. There is the useful quality in it, and his need understands the phenomenon in terms of its usefulness. But the man is conscious of having got something more than he sought for, something that he has no particular use for, but which nevertheless yields him profound delight. The object not merely satisfies but delights him and fills him with a sense of possession. Satisfaction cannot be said to be a positive feeling. It is merely the eradication of need. In order therefore that an experience may yield a positive consciousness there must already exist a feeling of satisfaction with regard to that particular object. That is to say there ought not to be a craving felt for it.

It is a peculiar characteristic of æsthetic

life that it is full of revelations. Every phenomenon has got an unexpected treasure to reveal to the æsthete, for, he never really needs them. To the æsthete who lives a life of the fewest needs, and who never goes with a begging bowl but limits his necessities to the fewest of things, the universe holds out its precious mines of harmonies, the blending of colors, forms and sounds.

Every man, to some extent or other, lives an æsthetic life even as he lives an economic, moral and intellectual life. Just as a man who is more inclined towards the useful aspect of things and tries to sacrifice the development of his other aspects, say the logical and moral aspects, in order to develop his capacity of discovering more usefulness in a greater number of things, is called an economical man and, similarly the man who sacrifices his economic considerations for the sake of developing his moral susceptibility is called a very moral man, even so is the man who sacrifices his other interests to develop his æsthetic susceptibility and improve his capacity for the discovery and appreciation

of beauty, is called an æsthete. There is as much difference between the æsthete and the ordinary man, as there is between the latter and the economical man or the moral man or the metaphysical man. This is merely the most elementary difference between the normal man and the æsthete. The artist who is first and foremost an æsthete is a more complex and a more comprehensive being. But to say that an artist is an extremely æsthetic man is to say the least about him, perhaps the most self-evident fact about him that never needs any telling. It is necessary, therefore, before we deal with the artist that we should understand the nature and limitations of a completely æsthetic life.

One thing we know, that, what the æsthetic faculty does, is the cognition of beauty in form, color and sound and in the subjective feeling they create. Now then the economical man developes a partiality for that aspect of life and is not unhappy to sacrifice his normal æsthetic capacity in order to enhance his money-saving or earning capacity. He will have no other meaning for the

word, wealth, than the possibility or source of usefulness, and by usefulness he means the satisfaction of organic needs. The moral man in the same way sacrifices usefulness and æsthetic capacity in order to sharpen his moral faculty or conscience to an uncommon degree. His moral susceptibility grows keener and more fastidious. He would not mind strangling a tender emotion if he thought it necessary for what he might consider a moral satisfaction or fulfilment. Similarly, the æsthete will be prepared to sacrifice all pricks of conscience and all considerations of personal comfort and economic welfare for the sake of exercising the æsthetic faculty for its exclusive delight. The æsthete is essentially a subjectivist. That is, one who understands phenomena with reference to oneself and one's judgment only. But a moralist understands the world in reference to the good of the largest number of individuals and in accordance with the categorical imperative of human conscience.

The pure æsthete (i. e.) the man who lives at the expense of his other faculties, is accord-

ing to the judgment of normal standards of humanity a selfish epicure. But one thing has got to be said on behalf of the æsthete. He is anything but selfish. He pursues his æsthetic life as arduously and earnestly as the moralist, and his life is as much an organic necessity to him as it is to the bird to sing. He is not even like the hedonist pursuing his life for pleasantness of sensation, but lives his life irrespective of the pleasant and unpleasant sensations that such a life may incur. (Keat's Song of Opposites).

Welcome joy, and welcome sorrow,
 Lethe's weed, and Hermes' feather ;
 Come today, and come tomorrow,
 I do love you both together !—
 I love to mark sad faces in fair weather ;
 And hear a merry laugh amid the thunder ;
 Fair and foul I love together.

He is as arduous about his pursuit of what he thinks beauty as the moralist is about what he thinks to be the 'highest good.' To interpret one in terms of the other:—To the æsthete, perfect beauty is the highest good ; to the moralist, the greatest good is perfect

beauty; to the metaphysician, 'absolute truth' is the highest good and perfect beauty.

But the former's perfect beauty may not after all be identical with the latter's highest good though both may set aside the considerations of pleasant and unpleasant feelings. It is therefore necessary that we should find a mediator between the three who will be able to dictate his standard to all the three and make their ideals identical. And if art must be understood as the perfect expression of human life, it must offer us a synthetic ideal that can be identified with the æsthete's perfect beauty, the Moralist's greatest good and the metaphysician's absolute truth.

Here now we may draw the difference between the normal man's and the æsthete's life. It is not only a difference in degree but is also one in kind, owing to the changed outlook of life that he takes. To the normal man every experience has a particular value in satisfying his various needs. But he has a more or less equal standard of evaluation. He could never entertain the idea of attending a drama or buying a nice color work if he felt

that he could not have his usual breakfast the next morning without that money. He sets a limitation to his needs and lives a 'balanced' life. But the æsthete feels an organic need to satisfy his æsthetic sense, and he would not only not think of the next morning's breakfast but would be prepared for any kind of trouble. His inner aspiration for beauty is so great and intense that it renders him blind to the other considerations of life. He will therefore define his life in terms of his own peculiar outlook. The most delicate color blend, the harmony of sound and the perfection of shape and the peace fullest activity—these will constitute his ideal of life and will inevitably lead him to set aside many considerations about the other aspects of life. To the normal man they appear flagrant perversity of taste and violation of 'principles.' To the æsthete however moral and social conventions mean the limitation of the free nature of life. All limitation is morbid because it suppresses the spontaneity of our aspiration for enlargement, for enrichment.

But it must be said that the completely

æsthetic life, living only for and in the experience of beauty not as the instructive imagination understands it in the light of universal social and ethical principles, but as it is given to the æsthetic faculty merely, has a sensuous nature. The faculty of imagination which is the great creative power of the human mind and which is the guide to all our higher activity, is silently absent from the purely æsthetic life. With the aid of the physical senses the æsthetic faculty experiences the beauty in the various consciousnesses of pain and pleasure obtained through the outer senses. It exercises the greatest sway over the other senses and bends them to its will. It has no interests other than its own satisfaction. It stands conspicuously above the surface of the man's consciousness and he only perceives that. He sees barely aught else. This is the merely æsthetic life, the life of thrilling excitement, not however, the vulgar one of pleasantness alone, but the disinterested one that invites with equal partiality both the pleasant and the unpleasant. But it can claim no intellectual or spiritual

elevation. At best it is an emotional enrichment only. This emotional wealth is of course necessary and forms an important characteristic of the artist but that is not all. The artist is no mere æsthete; he is more. The pure æsthete is merely an emotional being, one who lives in his emotions (i.e.) in his perceptions of beauty. He is a passive personality and must learn to be much more than a self-contained, emotional beauty-lover before he can be entitled to the name of 'Artist.'

III

ÆSTHETIC EXPRESSION

“THE man is only half himself, and the other half is his expression” (Emerson). Our experience acquires completeness and reality in its expression. When an impression or experience is complete, it inevitably leads the man to embody it in some kind of expression or other, a smile, a shriek, a shudder or a song or dance. He makes no voluntary effort to express but only feels himself in the mood to do so. In truth, it is the impression itself that develops into the expression, for, after the process of expression is over, the impression loses a good deal of its intensity and man calls that ‘disburdening.’

Every individual feels, thinks and has ideas and concepts. And every one gives expression to them in some form or other, thus enabling a mutual relationship and understanding among men. Social life is possible only when there is a mutual expres-

sion of feelings and thoughts. This is the normal life of expression. With the artist expression is organic, for the intensity of his experience needs to give itself expression owing to the spontaneous urge to do so. Therein the artist realises the reality of his experience. The pure æsthete who recognises nothing else than the naked phenomenon of beauty, embodies his emotional life in images and words or colors and tunes that have no greater suggestion to man, than the mere awakening of a dreamy emotion that sees no farther than the length of its own duration. It is mute like the flower and insensible to its own fragrance. The cuckoo warbles. It is music, but is not enlightening. It is mute speech unlike the music of a song. Even so is the pure æsthetic emotion unaspiring and unenlightening. It of course affects the intellect, even as the incense smoke does. The chord that connects the body and the soul, the intellect and the heart, is untouched. There emerges no sound; no symbol springs up to throw light on the secret niches of our being and reveal the

wells of immortality. At best you forget yourself. When you remember, you do not know whether you are asleep or awake. It is like a magician's charm and not a prophet's revelation. As in Keats' *Endymion* and Our Jayadeva's love-songs, you find yourself surrounded by fairy fantasies, the dancing nakedness of angelic forms, the voluptuous outpourings of inebriating scents by the surfeited flowers and the thrilling delicacy of color rendered soporific by the mystic brilliance of the cool moonlight. You feel as if you are being entombed in a sleep of fairy dreams. This is the nature of the pure æsthetic emotion that expresses itself in an equally æsthetic form, which is an end in itself without any suggestion or message for life. It does not lead life anywhere but leaves it where it was. It is like the sprinkling of rose-water that never wets a man but gives him the freshness of a bath. Sri Sankaracharya describes the pure æsthetic experience in his characteristic way:—
*Veenaya rupa soundaryam thanthree vadana
 soushtavam praja ranjanamathram, thanna-*

samrajyaya kalpathay. "The beauty of the veena and the sweet music of its strings only delight the heart, but do not possess imperial sway over it." But life refuses to be stationary. It wants hand-posts, symbols, and prophecies to guide it to a future. It wants light, brighter and brighter still, to enable it to dispell all doubts and illusions. It aspires for beauty but struggles to preserve it without melting away in the brilliance of truth.

Life requires a song. Beauty gives it a tune and truth the words. Life requires an idol to worship. Truth gives the metal and beauty the design. Life requires a prophet to preach it. Truth incarnates as his soul and beauty as his voice. The artist is the outcome.

IV

THE NATURE OF ART

IT would not be right nor possible to attempt at any definition of the nature of art, for to define is to build up a boundary wall and prevent all expansion, which is the principal aim and sign of life, and art is born of it. Life finds itself ushered into this world—for that is how man feels—and the surrounding universe by its resistive variety of color, form and sound, sets the mind thinking over the problems of existence. Civilisation has been one series of such attempts by man, to discover the secret of the world and realise its true relation to the former. The several sciences that have been invented by man's intellectual genius have sifted, analysed and systematized the universe in order to discover the when and the wherefore of the world. Science has achieved much in discovering the properties of matter and has reduced it from the immense density of the phenomenal world which thwarts the

ordinary mind, to the atoms and molecules that are equally too subtle for the ordinary understanding. So much about the material science that deals with the external matter. Now to the sciences that deal with the process of our perception and varied experience of the subjective self. There are the sciences of psychology and metaphysics. In the untrained and consequently unscientific mind there is a prompting to regard the external universe or nature as having a secret sympathy with man and capable of aiding or thwarting him in his endeavours according to its caprice. Again man feels an un-argued conviction that the vast scheme of this universe has a vital purpose in view through all the varied processes of its creative and destructive tendencies. And that he has a great and holy part to play in it. He says to himself "if this were not so, how and why should I be here? I have something to do with all that I perceive and feel. There must be a defined or evolving purpose which alone could give sanity and reality to the universe, for otherwise this should only

be a capricious chimera of unreality, a bottomless depth that cannot exist."

Whether it be sound or not, the human mind has its function and fulfilment only in a purposeful and harmonious universe in whose scheme of working, man fills a very important and vital place. But material science has failed to endorse such a view, for, man there, is lost in the vast operation of forces too powerful to recognise his importance and the world of individual wholes is reduced to impersonal automatons of atomic or molecular inter-action. The possibility of a strong personal will whose moral excellence is responsible for the integrity of the universal scheme wherein every small detail evolves or is born in harmony with that supreme will, is not to be found in science. And the whole truth of the human being is the personal will of the individual whose consciousness of the harmonic continuance of the personal element through all the series of perceptions and activities constitutes his life. That is the sole truth of the man. This view of life which the ordinary man as distin-

guished from the scientist, constructs for himself is entitled to our belief. It is wrong to suppose that science has rendered our ordinary perceptions and their consequent philosophy unsound or untrue. It has simply discovered the possibility of another vista of truth.

The ordinary man sees the sun rise with some thing of a religious feeling. But the man with the scientific sight flatly denies all the personal experience and perceptions and asserts that the sun is stationary and that the earth goes round itself from west to east which causes the illusion of the sunrise. He asserts it because he perceives it through his theoretical eye and considers it highly wise to override the ordinary physical organs of perception denouncing them as delusive. My table has a very soft and smooth surface and I feel a very comfortable sensation when I pass my palm on it. But I look at the same surface through a magnifying glass, when lo, and behold! hills and valleys so high and rough as would bruise any palm that attempted to caress it. Which of my experiences is true? I cannot possibly

deny that my table has small ups and downs : but they are too small for my sense of touch. They are true only when I see them through my scientific lens. Of my personal life of touch they do not form any part. To me it is undeniably true that my table is smooth. What the scientific lens shows is a nightmare of truth. So it is with our experiences of the heavenly bodies. If from too long a distance how one sees things is not to be called true, how one sees from too short a distance must be equally untrue. Further the position in which we normally find ourselves and which gives us the perceptions of the sunrise and sunset are true and natural while that of science is artificial and temporary. If instead of our ordinary eyes we were born with the telescopic vision, then the scientific truth would hold good in our personal lives too. But now the fact being otherwise, it cannot. Truth therefore has two aspects, the personal and the scientific. Hence the sunrise and the sunset are as valid an expression of truth as that the earth goes round itself. Otherwise life would be rendered an intoler-

able lie, all our vital experiences being a conspiracy against the very truth of our being. Scientific truth therefore is not the whole of truth. Science cannot displace nature (natural life).

The ordinary or the natural experience of the world and the philosophy constructed upon it appeals to the soul and can satisfy its aspiration for truth as much as any scientific or metaphysical theory with all its subtleties of logical and psychological analysis. As long as life is not dialectic, the achievements of the latter must await the sanction of the former to enter into the realm of personal truth. This recognition, embodied in the natural life of man and the attitude that, emphasising its claim for our appreciation, gives it free and picturesque expression, is art.

In life we see a multitude of things, facts and events. If one could take a total perspective of the multitude, it would look a bewildering phenomenon of confusion. But the mind of man possesses the magic quality of dividing them up into their proper kinds and mutual relationships and impressing the soul with life's unity. As a result, life is an

harmonious unity of things, beings and facts, for the multitude of facts cannot enter into human consciousness in their isolation but must share in the soul's quality of the unity of purpose and life. Therefore it is that the artist, be he poet or painter, always perceives the vision of the unity of the universe. And the ultimate expression and tendency of life is to realise this unity.

Man is the poet and the world is his language. He must choose his words from it and combine them into a poem which has the unity of idea in spite of the multiplicity of the meanings of the individual words in the poem. He has the power to so unite the words as to make them contribute to the fulfilment of his idea all the riches of their individual meaning. Therefore the artist is not bewildered by the hugeness and the multiplicity of the universe even as the architect is not by the number of the stones heaped up before him, for he has in him the unity of plan towards whose realisation they contribute.

Art is not merely the literary or coloury or vocal expression in all the picturesque

ornamentation of symbol and style, but is more significant in its original forms of the impulse and the mentality that are fully suggestive of the personal truth and the excellence of the natural philosophy of life. Art is not merely the objectified or the materialised forms of expression of this philosophy such as poetry, painting and music, but is also the creative impulse of life itself and the individual moments and attitudes of the mind when the latter is captivated by the enchantment of this romantic philosophy of life. It would be wrong to think that art denies the claims of science. It only denies that science can displace or invalidate life. Science and art are not hostile to each other, but are each other's complements, and correctives. We are here concerned with the characteristics of art and its forms of expression, now that we have understood its relation to science and life. We are dealing with the original impulse of art itself and not with what in ordinary speech we call art, meaning thereby the skilful handling of any piece of work physical, literary or musical. The sub-

lime mentality which is in harmony with the working of the universe, and which is illumined by the beauty of its comprehensive love for all things and beings, is art and its materialised forms of expression constitute the treasures of art and philosophy on earth. The art of this world is only the materialised expression of the sublime reality of the soul's attitude of harmony and beauty. The artists of the highest type have always lived and realised their true personality in this attitude and all their works are the expressions in material forms of this attitude whose inspiration has been their mainstay of life. This harmonic attitude it is, that opens to the artist the secret heart of the universe, wherein he finds installed the same life as is in him and sings the united homage of the universe to the supreme personality, out of whose fulness and perfection the universal drama has acquired its characters and accoutrements.

The success of the drama is in mutual harmony and response, and life is a drama the nature of whose termination is unknown but is suggestively offered to man to know

through his instinct and aspiration. In the light of this suggested knowledge man must trim his character and tune his speech and contribute his voice to harmonise with the universal chorus. This is the distinctive nature of art, to convey the message of harmony and to emphasise the need for our response to natural influences and impulses and enrich human personality by uniting with the external nature for the free growth of the spiritual being in us. The cultivation of a more intimate relation with the supreme personality and the realisation of the fulfilment of human personality and life itself, is the message and nature of art. Art is of the soul that has realised this sublime truth of life and has achieved its harmony with the universe. The impulse that urges man to this harmony of life and unfolds man's personality in the expressions of his sympathy and love for the universe is the true inspiration of art.

A man may choose with unerring precision the words he should use to express himself. He may even combine them into the sculptural perfection of metre and rhyme.

Can that make poetry worth the name? But when a poet is genuinely impelled by the artistic contemplation of the universe, he generates within himself a warmth of spiritual insight that inevitably helps him to cut his expression in the crystalline purity of literary as well as metrical perfection. In the true artistic contemplation, the insight is one of perfect harmony between the æsthetic and the spiritual impulses and one is more of an æsthete or a spiritual seer or *gnani* as we call him, according as the æsthetic or the spiritual impulse outweighs the other. Keats and Oscar Wilde belong to the former class, while in A. E. and Arabinda Ghose of our own times the spiritual insight of the seer and the prophet is more pronounced. Keats like our Jayadeva thirsts more for the lyrical nakedness of form, color and freshness which has a touch of sensuousness about it ; while the vision of A.E., A. Ghose and Swinburn, we may include our own Upanishadic mystics, is ablaze with the strong coloring of the spiritual realisation in which the subtler shades of the æsthetic components have been drowned.

The perfect artist holds the equilibrium between the two insights without allowing either to outweigh the other and set the harmony of life at naught. In his vision the foggy romance of lyric is impregnated with the dispelling warmth and perspicacity of the spiritual insight. In a word, in the perfect artist, the true and the beautiful so harmonise and blend with each other, as to render his soul to live in complete unison with the world of form, color and sentiment and with the transcendental one of thought and truth as well. This perfect equilibrium of art and the successful blending of the æsthetic and the spiritual insights expressing themselves in the message of harmony, i.e., our harmony with the universe and of the individual with the Supreme or the universal being, is best exemplified in our own day by the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore in the East, and W. B. Yeats, Shelly, Tennyson, and Coleridge in the West, and our great Thyagaraja of South India, with the exquisite sweetness of his musical soul, make the nearest approach to the perfect artist.

THE OPTIMISM OF ART

HOWEVER much one may try to question the reality of nature or the phenomenal world, one cannot help admitting the diffiant indifference with which it seems to treat man. Its triumphant glory of color and freshness fills man's heart with a wondering sympathy and admiration. The sublime vastness of the sky fills the heart with an inspiration to enlarge itself into the serene boundlessness of the heavens. The copious ocean with its eternal warfare with itself aided by the mischievous liberality of the wind seems unconscious of the rest of creation in the supreme self-absorption of its thundering music. The human heart feels itself neglected owing to the stupendousness and self-assertion of the world about it. Like a child placed in the midst of a fancy goods shop, man feels bewildered to know what it all could mean, and doubts if they do not intend

to close in upon him, and press him out of existence. But he suddenly discovers a doll, smiling friendship and love at him. He takes heart and turns round. To his surprise he finds that the variety about him is most favourably disposed towards him, and feels himself no longer alone in their midst. Man finds an eternal friend and sympathiser in the apparent indifference and self-absorption of nature. Man's relation to Nature is one of kinship and love. Without the co-operation of the external universe, man cannot live one single moment of his life. If every moment he met with resistance from nature, it is because his freedom of action is possible owing to that very resistance. There could be no conquest if there was not an enemy to conquer. Nature's love for man masquerades in the appearance of resistance in order to secure for him the joy of victory, like the mother who pretends to have been defeated in her mockfight with the child in order to yield him the sense of triumph. The mother's joy is in that of the child. Even so nature realises her power in the growing power of

man who imagines to be overcoming nature's resistance. This struggle between nature and man, is a perpetual mock fight between the mother and the child.

In this sense, all our daily struggles and anxieties of life in our fight against circumstances are but a storm in the tea cup. All the energy of life expends itself to bring about a result that it never contemplated, but which in spite of itself, happens to be the logical outcome of its endeavours. Here is the secret of nature's conspiracy. The mother lures the child into her arms by enraging him so that he, attempting to rush upon her for revenge, finds himself a prisoner in the warmth of her tight embrace. Thinking that nature intends to separate mankind by her distances, man begins to invent means to 'conquer' the limitations of nature. When he has actually 'conquered' her, what triumphant exultation does he not feel, proudly flying in the mid-air and speaking across the oceans! Nature only hides a smile of realised love from us for all our 'victories' over her. All her distances, her-

oceans and mountains, her storms and thunderbolts are mere allurements to bring mankind nearer to her by their increased strength and pertinacity and intelligence. All these seeming obstacles are her expressions of love for man. For man to rebel against nature is to enter deeper into her love, even as the wave falls deeper into the water the higher it rises above the surface. Every sunrise lends a freshness to life. How often do we not feel in a mood of pathos, and wish that it might be always day and no night ! Imagine for one moment that such a wish were granted. Within the course of a few hours our heart would certainly feel that time had lost its breath and the day its charm. We would perceive a death-like immobility in life. Soon out of sheer ennui of the sun we would curse our own wish and the cruel being that granted it so easily. We would then realise, that life consists in change that gives it freshness and mobility.

If we set ourselves to think a little more on these matters we would find it foolish on our part to wish that things were otherwise

than they are. But that does not render our aspirations meaningless, for they are the means through which the knowledge of the propriety of the existing arrangement of things dawns upon us.

What is it then that is left for us to do? What are we to think of these waves of feelings that perpetually wash the sands of our soul? What shall we say about our longing for a peace? And why does it demand preference over the 'distractions' of life. Why is there a longing for a finality or goal as we call it? And why do we not feel satisfied with a continuation of things as they are? These questions, each in itself, would require a whole life time of attention and thinking, perhaps with no satisfying answer in the end. What we at best could do, would be to understand how men have tried to solve them and choose that which appeals to our being, as the more true or satisfying. From times immemorial the men who have attempted to think of these questions and who have raised more questions of this kind are known as philosophers. They may not have any satisfactory

and final answer to any of these problems, but they render life more interesting and mysterious by raising more questions. Most often it is the chagrin caused by the unrelenting order of things as against the aspiration of of the æsthetic individual that originates the philosophic mentality. All philosophy is questioning the place and nature of things. Why is sweet sweet? Why does gravitation pull? The answer for such questioning is merely begging the question. When man realises the futility of such revolutionary questioning and the sterile dissatisfaction that it causes, he feels the impossibility of life without a satisfying explanation of itself. Life must know or believe it knows why it exists. Man's only recourse is to experience the variety of the life-phenomenon and the mystery of its beginning and end. Then comes the stage of interpretation and understanding.

Perhaps he has to confess to himself his inability to understand life's secrets and console himself with its picture-show like the child that is enclosed within the darkness and

cannot perceive the mystery of the screen. What is left to it is, to base its life on the ground of its experience and its mysterious picturesqueness. In a word the only apology for life is art, whose message is that life is worth living on its own account, though it may not lead to a future. It declares the sanctity of life in itself and not only when it leads to a God. Art assures man that he lives in the midst of an harmony whose law is loyalty. Rebellion sounds the note of discord and throws man out of his proper place in the world. If he took care to preserve the harmony by keeping to his allotted place in the universe and thus contributed to the chorus of life, his labour would be sufficiently repaid by the sense of peace and joy. To him life gives the harmony whose perpetuation is his only duty and truth. The key-note of art, as the one explanation of life, is loyalty to the harmony we perceive; and all our inclination to rebel against it serves as a means to realise its truth and finality. "Do your duty to the world and every thing takes care of

itself" is the watchword of art. In its sight there is no small and no great. There is only variety on the basis of equality. The difference between one man and another is the difference in their points of vision, but there is absolutely no question of status. The poor man is as significant as the rich one, for they contribute equally to the festival of life. Life therefore has only one absolute value in which all the mutually opposing tendencies or forces can be reconciled and to which they contribute with equal dignity and pride. That one absolute value, whose nature is the inclusion of all things must necessarily lead life to the widest expansion so as to include all things and realise their truth in itself.

VI

THE INFINITUDE OF LOVE

LOVE is the quality of the soul and the soul's aspiration is infinitude. Man has no satisfaction or joy until he realises that infinitude of being ; and the one means that he commands is the nature of his soul, viz., love, whose fulfilment is in the comprehension of all things in itself.

The life of the ordinary man is unblossomed and is like the bud. His consciousness of life and himself is vague and broken into the incidents of daily life. There is no taking stock of things, no revision or review of life which is a primary characteristic of art life. The artist every moment of his life feels the continuity of his individual consciousness, from the past into the future. The present is merely the flagman at the gate who allows the train of his consciousness to pass through into the future. Owing to the undeveloped and

vague nature of the ordinary man's consciousness, it limits itself by defining a narrow circle which includes a few things and beings with his self as the centre. All that is outside that circle is alien and must be regarded with indifference if not with suspicion. The vastness of the world outside him either bewilders him or drops out of his consciousness being too superfluous to him. His affections and his love which is the consummation of all kinds of affections have a very narrow expanse and consequently his soul is too small. He has fears and anxieties that one day quite an alien set of things might pounce upon the quiet of his narrow self-absorption and set an hostile world before him to face. It would not be bad if he were not conscious of his own limited range of being, but the truth is otherwise. His fears and anxieties are due to the consciousness of his limited life of exclusion which creates the sense of alienation towards the rest of the world.

The reason for a such a limitation of self is evidently a want of the sense of beauty,

and a predominance of the utilitarian values of life. Things that bear the evident stamp of beauty make their entrance into our soul, for beauty is the voice of love. There is no beauty that is unfamiliar to us for it takes all ceremony out of our minds and impels us to a spontaneous inclusion of it into ourselves. Where this sense of beauty is most developed there is no land that is unfamiliar, no person that is strange and no emotion but that of love. Such an individual has but one need in life, viz., the fulfilment of his nature, Love. He is too rich in it and offers it to him that asks and to him that asks not too. He loves the known and the unknown. His consciousness is ablaze with infinite love and is troubled by no fears and anxieties. He recognises the unique place of each thing and being, in the vast procession of life. The broad divisions of pain and pleasure of life according to the ordinary man's point of view, lose their comparative values and cause for preference and avoidance, and acquire a significance, each its own, in the all-inclusiveness of the artist's love. They become like the black and the

white, that equally contribute, to the making of this picture of life. The man that looks at the black and the white separately loses the picture's beauty as a whole.

The synthetic quality of love alone, which proclaims itself through beauty, can enable life to this understanding. Art, as the message of beauty and, through it, of love, reveals this synthetic vision of life wherein all the mutually opposing tendencies betray their nature as contributors to the chorus of life.

VII

ART AND MYSTICISM

THERE is a hidden cause behind every phenomenon. There are experiences in each individual's life-history which do not lend themselves to any rational explanation. They are nevertheless as real as their own existence, and perhaps have been responsible for some profoundest changes in it. What premonitions utterly inexplicable and incomprehensible at their time have not proved true in the course of one's life? Some times one, in a wholly unprepared moment, beholds a vision pregnant with suggestions of one's past and future. Has not even the least of sentimental men read in a moment of keen expectation and anxiety, a meaning and nature in things that are quite beyond the surface and their ordinarily accredited nature? All this because, there is something in human nature that seeks to find the beyond of things and which feels that things are

not completely what they appear, but are more pregnant with the message of what they hide from ordinary human vision. In the first place even the depths of human consciousness itself are not given to man to fathom and understand. It is almost with a pain that one often realises in moments of trial both in the waking and in the dreaming consciousnesses, that deeper forces than what one calls the 'Will' come into play and decide the issue. One has but to simply witness and take stock of events and actions that happen in the region of one's own self-consciousness even. No introspective individual can deny that the final force that determines all things from the smallest liking to the strongest passions and decisions is beyond ourselves, and is deep down behind all things and beings. This sense of the beyond of the world is what makes the mystic's position peculiarly his own and apparently unintelligible to matter-of-fact men who see a stone as a stone and a brick as a brick. It is really impossible to be satisfied with the things of the world and take them

as final in themselves. Because human consciousness carries with it a memory of things that are alien to the world in which it finds itself and which promises the realisation of the soul's nature and aspirations. It is that memory that eternally haunts the imagination of the more self-conscious individuals among us like the poets and the painters. If that is not so, how else are we to account for these soaring conceptions whose very thought so enraptures our souls, when we see how impossible it is to think of a single thing under the sun, we have not seen or heard of. It is no wonder then that to those who live an intensity of life, that is quite beyond the reach of ordinary men such peepings behind the veil that envelopes this world should be given. Their life by its very energy of aspiration and the intensity of its self-consciousness, illumines the soul and reveals the truth of its nature. This lingering consciousness of one's original glory is amply borne out by Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality'.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :

The soul that rises with us, our life's star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar :
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home :

In our daily life we are very small and subject to the tyrannical caprices of the elements. We are pulled along the path of life by running time which will not for all we might do, retrace a step or stop a moment to allow us to take breath. In short, man is a victim to unknown powers that continually play pranks upon him, utterly indifferent to the bitterness of feeling that they cause him. But man has other resources of life to secure him from the onslaughts of the external world. Of all the creatures in the world, man is the most rebellious one and he chafes at the resistance of the world, for, his desire is to be the master of all.

But he has found within himself a vast realm whereof he is the undisputed monarch. At his sweet pleasure he can set the hand of the clock to go back the hours it has travers-

ed. In that realm the sun and the moon are at his command. Therein his dreams, more wonderful than any that Alladdin's lamp could invoke, can be realised. Naturally man falls back upon himself for the realisation of his inner aspirations and weaves a world out of the subtle threads of the imagination and securely laughs at the world which is bent upon humiliating him, for its impotence to reach him in the paradise of his imagination. From that world of immortal life, come these messengers to speak to the chafing world to give it consolation and hope. They are the great mystics that breathe the life of infinitude and impart the hope of immortality to men. When once they have discovered the truth of their nature and have realised the world wherein their soul finds its true home, they no longer see the hostility of this world. The world changes its attitude towards them for they have discovered its secret. It greets them with a friendly smile and thenceforward becomes a helpmate and a means for their realisation. It is like the small piece of hollow bamboo that prevents the free flow of

our breath, giving way only very feebly. But when we know how to utilise its resistive nature and discover and master the secret of our mutual relation, at once the bamboo changes into an exquisite medium through which to sing the sweetest tunes of your soul's truth and beauty. It is in such a state of realisation that the mystic finds the highest wisdom in the voice of the wind and the greatest joy in the azure peace of the sky.

The mystic stands on the threshold of two worlds. His vision of the other world he tries to convey to this world to which he owes his life and experience. In that other world, to perceive is to know, and to know is to be, for it is a subtle world where all things and beings are made of and live in truth. For us to go into that world is to become and live in that truth, which is no impersonal and unfeeling force, but a living personal consciousness able to concentrate itself into a supreme personality or diffuse itself into the infinitude of the universe at will. *Eko-vasi sarva bhuthantharatma, Ekam rupam bahuda yah karothy.* In a word what distinguishes the

mystic from the others is his intense spiritual consciousness. But what is the nature of this consciousness?

In our daily work-a-day life we go through a train of consciousness of the things of the outside world and occasionally of 'ourselves' too, when our relationship with those things is concerned. But what is that 'ourselves'? It is most often either our passion for profit and happiness or our aversion for pain and sorrow and sometimes the sum total of our likes and dislikes. But that is not our true self. The central truth of our being is missed in identifying ourselves with our passions. The person with the self-conscious assertive energy, who rules over the passions in whose happy selection he manifests himself, is the truth of our existence; and all our likes and dislikes are true when they serve to manifest that truth. But is that truth, i.e., are we final in ourselves? or do we have to seek finality and perfection for ourselves in some other thing or being? It is in answer to this question that the mystic throws open the

doors of his self to admit the flood of infinite life that flows from the inexhaustible source. When we thus receive and live this infinite life, our consciousness overflows its bounds and spreads itself upon the surrounding regions. That is why those that live the infinite life have extended their self so as to include their surroundings, and even the whole world through their sympathy and love. Such men have lived and thought not for themselves but for the whole of mankind. In India, the Upanishads are the highest achievements of such extended self-consciousness and infinite life. The upanishadic mystics possessed the true artistic intuition through which they knew and lived the infinite life and discovered the way for the perfection of the self.

Thus we see that the mystic's attitude is primarily spiritual. If one had to deal with the world of ours, there would be no need to be mystic, for what things we know we know to be clear as daylight. There are only two obscure regions wherein the light of the worldly sun cannot penetrate, viz., the

human soul and the divine soul it is after. When such a subject offers itself for treatment there is no room for definitions and manipulations, nor even a possibility of exhaustive description. So out of the intensely cultivated region of the seer's consciousness, whenever the shower of divine grace descends upon it, there appear sprouts of suggestion that embody the infinite potentiality into which men can consummate and of which they were born. All the deep utterances of our seers are but the faintest echoes of the infinite voice. Hence it is that those echoes seek the aid of art and appear in the multi-colored robes that it has to offer. Our poets and painters are replete with an overflowing consciousness of that life, and their works contain the suggestions of a greater life in store for humanity. But in thus delivering their message why they choose the magic aid of art is owing to its flexible and comprehensive luxuriance of symbol which contains the crystallised sentiment of generations of humanity.

VIII

ART AND SYMBOL

THE Divine Being has created all the things of this world to speak for His nature. The world of colors, shapes and sounds is his speech. The world in its turn seeks expression for its nature, for the law of being is expression. To express is to unfold which is the mission of existence. That process of unfoldment is eternal because for every such unfoldment there opens the possibility of a higher existence. Progress is like describing concentric circles ever wider and wider. We are now concerned with this law of expression which helps life to its infinite enlargement.

What is expression ? ' I feel hungry ' is the expression I give to my feeling of hunger, whose nature or property these words do not contain but convey. That is to say that our inner nature seeks to suggest itself in things, sounds and colors that have no vital relation-

ship with it but which yet can convey its life-meaning to the understanding of alien individuals. In that sense every expression—word, color, or deed—is a symbol of an inner idea. Let us elucidate it a little further.

In the present stage of human life the sound of our speech is identical with its meaning. So speech like our meaning is a quality of our being. Our tongue is merely the material agent that represents our meaning, for speech is the activity of the tongue. This is exactly the relation of every expression or symbol to an idea. The symbol is the tongue of the idea.

Every word in human speech is a symbol, but owing to our too constant acquaintance with them they have lost their fragrance of poetry and have sunk into the mire of work-a-day prose. What is prose but hackneyed poetry? In the history of every language, one can see how many words and phrases degenerate from their original luxuriance of poetic suggestiveness into the famished emptiness of exhausted life and drag on their careers of forgotten glory. If one traces the

descent of each word, it would lead one to believe that every common plebian of to-day was originally a noble of the highest rank. Every common word reminds us of a bankrupt millionaire.

As in our social life so in our expressive life, the old order gives place to the new. Every generation and age has its new coinage and mint. New symbols spring up from the freshness of the spring of new social and cultural conditions and consequently, the poetry and art of each age receive their life from the vitality of the symbols forged on the anvil of changed life. Every such expression which is replete with the fresh life of romance and can awaken in the alien understanding the intense vividness of vision which in the original mind was its parent, is a symbol, and art in every age seeks its aid to represent its nature.

In prose we aim at precision like science. But we encourage extravagance in poetry. In prose we may love another intensely. But in poetry that will not do, for there our heart or soul must either burst or overflow with

excessive love, or we must be drowned in its ocean or we must allow cupid to wound us severely with the poignant thrusts of his rose-headed arrows. Art is 'fine excess,' as Keats has said, and the excess that our symbols embody must be such as has not been already digested by the race-consciousness, for to digest it is not to feel its fulness.

But how are these symbols created? Can they suddenly sprout up from an individual's imagination like the mushrooms from the rain-drenched earth? That cannot be: for if they came up suddenly from the private fancy of an individual, how could they touch and awaken other hearts and minds to the rhythm of identical visions and emotions with his? For them to accomplish this they must be born of the common storage of race-consciousness, which is homogeniously spread in all hearts but which has surged into a wave of symbolic expression in one, owing to its peculiar warmth of intense aspiration and life.

The individual discovers the symbol which has been latent in the race. The

symbol has only its apparent birth in the individual, but becomes the property of the race for it was really born of the whole race.

Hence it is that all art, in spite of its individual origin, has its true basis in the race-life and becomes in the end the wealth of the race. All art existed before it was born. Kalidasa and Shakespeare, Beethoven and Thyagaraja, Budha and Christ existed in the race individuality before they incarnated as separate individuals of the race.

Therefore the line of difference between the ordinary expression and the symbolic expression is in the latter's freshness and intensity of life and its capacity to provoke the visualising faculty. Our experiences of events and things and persons and their consequent emotions crystallise into the tissues of our being, and every sound and feeling rouses up the latent embers of our past experiences. Every new sound has a vein of oldness running through it. Every new circumstance seems to have occurred once before.

The symbols of the artist have this magic power of reviving touch to an extraordinary

degree and he succeeds miraculously in capturing our hearts with those enchanting weapons, invoking before our vision the rarest combinations of our revived images and sounds. The language, environment, climate and religion of a race are responsible for the peculiar excellence and nature of its symbolism. The symbols as different from common speech are introduced when the intensity and excellence of our conceptions are beyond the powers of common expression. Such symbolism as conveys the highest meaning of things and beings naturally forms part of that life or consciousness which embodies the experience of those things and beings. That is why the highest symbolism of every race represents its sublime depths of religious consciousness, for mankind in all ages and races has had its highest perfection in religion.

All that we know in the form of ideas is constituted of the combined elements of visual, auditory and tactual perceptions of nature or the external universe as the metaphysician would call it. Hence it is that we

associate with these symbols our highest flow of emotion occasioned by the experience of the phenomenal or natural elements that constitute those symbols.....Nature therefore is the source of the artist's inspiration, be it religious or lay. Ever since the time man began to feel the creative urge in him and to give it expression through the various forms of his objectified concepts whose contents were drawn from nature and infused with a magnified vitality by the intensity of his aspiration, he has been investing nature and the external universe as a whole with a supremely moral nature and personality. Our instinctive belief in a moral nature and personal truth which we denominate as God, is due to our sharing in the artistic impulse. The creative urge in every man secretes a superabundance of the moral feelings of love and devotion and they find ~~after~~ expression and their fulfilment in seeking the supremely moral personality of God.

IX

ART AND RELIGION

(The Problem of Evil) .

IN these days when so much is being talked about the 'religions of the world,' and innumerable things like wars, conversions, and persecutions are perpetrated in its name, it is rather difficult to define the word in a universal terminology. But when one dives into the origin of religious psychology, one clearly sees that it is a matter concerning each individual soul and what he might call God. One naturally nowadays associates a mood of somberness, a certain unusual seriousness and perchance a bit of sorrow with the word religion. When one hears that a certain man in a place is very religious, at once one's impression of that man is an austere-looking, emaciated individual with a weighing expression of sorrow on his brows. The medieval exaggerated sense of human imperfection and sin and the awful conception of

a morose unrelenting God, are responsible in a great measure to this psychology. An ancient evil—call it sin, Satan or karma—is responsible to the phenomenal world and that God has been waging a regular war with that evil power to recover the world and man back to their pristine purity of immaculate truth and beauty, is the secret of every religious psychology, varying only with regard to the nature of the exact relation between God and man. It is indeed this sense of life's basic evil that has driven man to God. Religion therefore when divested of all its outer ritual and dogmas, is the bare co-operation of God and man in exterminating evil in whatever form it might present itself to our sense. The greatest teachers of humanity like Budha and Jesus have emphasised the presence of evil and suffering in life and have directly contributed, by the very nature of their lives, to the pathos of religious life. In a word, religious psychology has been rendered a subject for the science of pathology to investigate.

But there is the other side of the medal.

The world is not the offspring of evil nor does God occupy Himself with fighting it, for, naught is there in existence but is born of Him, the all perfect being, and evil could never come from such an one. Hence what we know as evil must necessarily have quite another meaning and interpretation altogether than as a personal or impersonal foe to God determined to beguile man out of his native glory of truth and joy. We recognise the presence of evil in the pain caused by the baffling relentlessness of the world and the conflict of individual interests. The finite quality of things which sets limitations to life, and death which quite appals us by its inevitability are the significant manifestations of what we call evil. Here we cannot help referring to the exquisite treatment of the problem of evil by Tagore, in his invaluable gem of a book, *Sadhana*. After explaining that evil is not a static fact but a transient phenomenon, he says "An imperfection which is not all imperfection, but which has perfection for its ideal must go through a perpetual realisation. Thus it is the

function of our intellect to realise the truth through untruths, and knowledge is nothing but the continual burning up of error to set free the light of truth. Our will, our character has to attain perfection by continually overcoming evils either inside or outside us or both. Our physical life is consuming bodily materials every moment to maintain the life-fire....." Thus he goes on to explain that evil is merely a transient medium through which we learn the nature of the good and the true which is eternal, the perfect and the infinite manifests itself through the imperfect and the finite, thus accentuating the excellence of the former. Evil, in a word, is but an opportunity for man to learn to appreciate the good and the beautiful. It will do us good to pursue the far-reaching suggestions of this explanation.

Each thing in the world has a certain law or nature of its own and when we feel the conflict between it and our individual wish, the sense of dis-satisfaction or evil springs up. We ask why this conflict? The only condition in which such conflict

could be avoided would be when things have no nature or law at all but our own, i.e., when nothing but ourselves should exist and all the world is an extension of ourselves. When I want to move my right hand without being obstructed by the table that now stands there in all its solidity, then it must either not exist there at all, or it must form a part of my own being. As long as it retains its separate individual nature I am bound to recognise it. Now if we want to see that things lose their separate and alien nature, we are wishing nothing but ourselves to exist. That is stultification, for then we stand self-baffled. If there is no one but ourselves, no law but of our own being, where then is our joy of wishing and its accomplishment? Where then can we see the Good, the positive good that we now experience in the overcoming of the evil? There is water in which, if we should drop, we sink. And one's wish is to float on it. But it has a certain nature, and unless we master it we cannot have the accomplishment of our wish. The swimmer has mastered it and hence in the place of his sense of water's evil he has

the joy of its friendship in the achievement of his desire. But if water had no such nature at all and we had only to step on it to find ourselves as on earth, then water would be no different from earth. Then since it was like earth, there would exist neither our wish nor the joy of achievement. Our contact with water would be as stale and as unyielding of joy as with earth.

Evil in every form is but resistance to our individual law or nature, and life has its exaltation and self-consciousness of joy in all its positive intensity when it has mastered opposition and has lorded over the resistive forces of life. Hence it is that the ancient seers of India have called the universe the *Brahma leela* or the play of Brahma. Truth manifests itself in such plural phenomena and nature that it may keep itself in the conscious realisation of its own joy, even as a man realises his own strength when he measures it against a combatant. From the point of view of Truth, evil and good are two combatants on the arena of life, and life's intrinsic attraction for the good and repulsion for the

evil is an indication of the former's finality and ultimate truth. We see the clouds hiding the sun but we believe in the truth of the unclouded sun. We see the night taking the place of the day, but we believe in the superior truth of day. Light destroys darkness but darkness destroys not the light. Good and evil are like the light and its shadow. Where there is no light neither is there shadow. Even so where there is no good neither is there evil. Truth that manifests itself, does so in the conflicting forces of life and where it does not manifest so, there it is *Nirguna Brahma*, quality-less Truth. But in its manifested nature, it is *Saguna Brahma* in its individuating and mutually differing *gunas* or natures. There, truth realises itself by creating the phenomenal variety of the world in whose conflicting tendencies its eternal and immutable nature is shown in conspicuous relief. This is the great *leela* of Brahma that is the cause of Creation. In the light of this understanding, when the self has abandoned its narrow alienating nature and has realised its identity with the all

and has achieved, what Dr. Cousins calls *Samadarsana*, "equi-sightedness" then evil and good are but the two phases of the same truth. The finite and the infinite are the two ends of the same stick. The inspiration of this enlightenment goads man to seek the point of view of Truth through love. Then dawns the disinterested attitude of the true Artist in whose evaluation good and evil receive equal favour, for it is through their conflict that life has its fulness and its reality. The true artist knows that the good, the true and the infinite is the ultimate truth of the world; but Truth is not a mere being like the stone. It is self-knowing and truth knows itself through the negation of these negative evanescent and hence unreal phenomena of the finite world. Hence the great paradox of the real being the truth of the unreal and the infinite of the finite.

When we know and have realised this supreme fact of life, then there is no need to feel a morbid pessimism about this problem of evil. Then we know that we are the offsprings and inheritors of the true and the

beautiful only. Consequently love becomes the inspiration and the motive force of life.

Budha and Jesus suffered because they had realised that suffering and evil are untrue and they preached love to the world in order to help it to the same realisation. The greatest poets have always sung of beauty and love, and humanity has always taken happiness and health to be the normal and true condition of life and their opposites as temporary aberrations. True religion therefore must help man to the realisation of the truth and permanence of joy and love as the artists of all ages have felt and expressed.

ART INCARNATION

THE inner beauty in us where we are in perfect harmony with the universe, is revealed in individual revelatory moments of our life when we are poets and painters. We see that beauty ; and when we give it expression, we 'be' it. The true artist is not only a seer but a 'be-er' as well. We are ordinarily human beings, but in individual moments of realisation we are Gods living in a higher realm of beauty and truth. Such momentary Godship earns us the name of 'artist.' But in human history now and then there appears a soul in human garb living in the midst of and apparently sharing in the frailties and distractions that mortal life is heir to, nevertheless acting as a dynamic source of spiritual exaltation diffusing an unworldly joy and beauty, and sub-merging all the world under an all-consuming ocean of love. In such an individual, the rare and the

momentary vision and life of the artist have been eternally imprisoned. In a word he is the incarnation of the very spirit of art. At all points of his being, that personality is merging with truth and hence draws his very life-breath from the infinite source. He is like the little bay that has penetrated into land but is a continuation of the ocean behind. He is like the superstructure that draws its strength from the subterranean foundation. Such an incarnation of the basic harmony of life, whose realisation is the spirit of art, appeared in human form in ancient India in the personality of Sri Krishna. He never preached like Budha and Jesus except on one occasion. To those who have known His life, He is the impersonation of all the romance and beauty that our soul thirsts for; and He chose to deliver His message not through the frail fragmented vocal quiverings that we call words, but through the native flowing effusion of the soul, viz., music. Krishna never spoke his message. He smiled, sang and blazed His message. He caught the whole world in the

net of his beauty and gathered it to His soul in one embrace of love. Nor did he sing in words. He sang in tunes through His *venu*, flute. Tunes suggest words but are deeper than words. When he blew his soul's secret through the *venu* His breath escaped through the little holes under his finger-ends and wandered through the world, robbing all it met of their little narrow self-contained self. When they lost their self they lost all the ties of the world and were caught under His song's enchantment. The world ran to Him to be enfolded in the eternal union of love. Thus Krishna sang all the world into Him.

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